

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /026 W
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O R 280944Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3412

INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 2395

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SWEL, ET, US

SUBJECT: RELIEF OPERATIONS IN ERITREA

REFS: GENEVA 1307

ADDIS 1988

ASMARA 238

1. SUMMARY. EMBASSY REQUESTS INSTRUCTIONS TO INFORM THE EPMG THAT IT ATTACHES IMPORTANCE TO THE EPMG'S EARLIEST APPROVAL OF SHIPMENTS OF MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND FOOD TO ASMARA. END SUMMARY.

2. PAPAL NUNCIO ETTELDORF DISCUSSED WITH CHARGE ON FEBRUARY 22 HIS DESIRE TO USE THE MAAG PLANE FOR THE TRANSPORTATION OF MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND FOOD TO ASMARA BY THE CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT FOR RELIEF AND DEVELOPMENT. THE SECRETARIAT IS PARTICULARLY ANXIOUS TO PROVIDE RELIEF SUPPLIES FOR THE 18,000 FULL-TIME REFUGEES WHICH ITS PRINCIPAL REPRESENTATIVE IN ASMARA SAYS ARE CURRENTLY LIVING IN VARIOUS CHURCHES AND MOSQUES. ON FEBRUARY 24 THE CHARGE TOLD ETTELDORF THAT THE ITALIAN EMBASSY HAD SUCCEEDED IN SENDING A SHIPMENT OF RELIEF SUPPLIES TO ASMARA ON ONE OF THE EAL FLIGHTS TO ASMARA WHICH NOW OCCUR AT REGULAR INTERVALS. HE

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SUGGESTED THAT THE CATHOLIC SERRETARIAT CONTACT EAL

AND SEE IF IT COULD ARRANGE ITS RELIEF SHIPMENT ON THE SAME BASIS.

3. EVENING OF FEBRUARY 27 REVEREND KEVIN DOHENY OF CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT INFORMED CHARGE THAT THE SECRETARIAT'S EFFORTS HAVE NOT YET BEEN SUCCESSFUL. DROUGHT RELIEF COMMISSIONER SHIMELIS HAS PROMISED TO ENDEAVOR OBTAIN PERMISSION FOR THESE SHIPMENTS FROM PMAC CHAIRMAN TEFERI BANTE BUT IT IS NOT CLEAR WHEN HE WILL REACH TEFERI OR WHETHER HE WILL BE SUCCESSFUL. TO DATE THE ICRC HAS BEEN UNABLE TO OBTAIN CLEARANCES TO FLY GRAIN AND FOOD STUFFS INTO ASMARA AND THE ETHIOPIAN RED CROSS IS RELUCTANT TO ATTEMPT ANY ACTION AT ALL BECAUSE

ITS OFFICERS FEAR BEING IMPRISONED FOR RELEASING ANY INFORMATION WHICH WOULD DEMONSTRATE THAT CIVILIANS IN ASMARA ARE IN NEED. THE CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT WAS ABLE TO MAKE ONE SHIPMENT OF 6 TONS SEVERAL WEEKS AGO BUT HAS HAD NO SUCCESS SINCE THAT TIME. IT NOW HAS 50 TO 60 TONS OF RELIEF SUPPLIES IN ADDIS WHICH IT WISHES TO SEND TO ASMARA AS SOON AS POSSIBLE FOR DISTRIBUTION BY ITS OFFICIAL THERE. 230 TONS OF RELIEF SUPPLIES HAVE JUST ARRIVED IN MASSAWA AND THE CATHOLIC SECRETARIAT HAS BEGUN EFFORTS TO OBTAIN PERMISSION TO SEND THESE SUPPLIES TO ASMARA.

4. EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THE CURRENT SITUATION WITH REGARD TO RELIEF SUPPLIES IS NOT ONLY DEPLORABLE ON HUMANITARIAN GROUNDS BUT THAT IT IS LIKELY TO BE CRITICIZED WITH INCREASING SEVERITY BY THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS AS MILITARY OPERATIONS PROCEED. THIS IN TURN WILL CREATE OBVIOUS PROBLEMS FOR THE USG, PARTICULARLY IF IT ACCEDES IN PART OF THE ETHIOPIAN AMMUNITION RESUPPLY REQUEST. WE ACCORDINGLY RECOMMEND THAT THE DEPARTMENT INSTRUCT US TO RAISE THIS ISSUE IMMEDIATELY WITH FOREIGN MINISTER KIFLE WODAJO AND TO INDICATE IN FIRM LANGUAGE THAT THE USG ATTACHES GREAT IMPORTANCE TO A FACILITATIVE ATTITUDE ON THE PART OF THE EPMG TOWARDS THE SHIPMENT OF RELIEF SUPPLIES TO ASMARA WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT SUCH A DEMARCHE NEED AWAIT THE CONFIDENTIAL

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DECISION ON THE AMMUNITION RESUPPLY REQUEST IF THE DECISION WILL NOT BE IMMEDIATELY FORTHCOMING.

5. ARCHBISHOP ETTELDORF IS ALSO GRATELY CONCERNED BY REPORTS OF ATROCITIES IN AND AROUND ASMARA ON THE PART OF THE ETHIOPIAN MILITARY. HE HAS EXPRESSED THE VIEW THAT SOME UN MEMBER STATES SHOULD CALL FOR AN INVESTIGATION OF THIS SUBJECT BY THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION,

AND HE INTEND TO PURSUE THE SUBJECT WITH ONE OR MORE
OF THE AFRICAN AMBASSADORS LOCATED IN ADDIS.

6. WITH REFERENCE TO ASMARA'S 238, WE REGRET THAT
COMPLICATIONS ENSUED FROM THE EMBASSY'S APPROACH TO
THE ETHIOPIAN RED CORSS. UNFORTUNATELY ERC INVOLVEMENT
WAS UNAVOIDABLE AS THE ICRC IS WORKING OUT OF ITS OFFICE
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: DISASTER RELIEF, ERITREA
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 28 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: KelleyW0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975ADDIS02395
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750070-1063
From: ADDIS ABABA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t1975025/aaaaadns.tel
Line Count: 123
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION SS
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: EXDIS
Reference: 75 GENEVA 1307
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: KelleyW0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <10 JUN 2003 by ElyME>; APPROVED <20 OCT 2003 by KelleyW0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: RELIEF OPERATIONS IN ERITREA
TAGS: PFOR, SWEL, ET, US, ICRC
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006